

APOSTATES, HERETICS, AND SECTARIANS IN MESSIANIC JEWISH CONTEXT

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Daniel C. Juster, Director Tikkun Int.

In a recent article in the Jerusalem Post, modern orthodox Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the chief rabbi of Efrat, railed against the boundary setting by ultra orthodox rabbis in Israel. Ultra Orthodox Rabbis have great power in deciding who is a Jew. Recently, hundreds of conversions were nullified by the Ultra Orthodox who seek the backing of the State, for their decisions. The conversions were performed under the authority of Rabbi Haim Druckman, one of the most revered leaders of the Zionist Orthodox in Israel. Amazingly, the Ultra Orthodox, who do not believe that the State of Israel is the will of God, have great power in the State because of coalition politics. Why would they reject these conversions? Because they are suspicious that Rabbi Druckman performed them only as part of his Zionist program. They do not think the converts are serious about Judaism. So a great boundary has been drawn. Here we see an amazing debate between two schools of Orthodox Judaism on defining who is accepted within the community as a Jew and who is not. The Supreme Court of Israel has accepted Reform and Conservative conversions done in the Diaspora eliciting a response of great anger among the Orthodox leadership. Yet only the Orthodox have authority for conversions in Israel, but which Orthodox?

The old canard, Judaism is a religion of deeds and Christianity of creeds will not hold up to scrutiny. True a halakhically defined Jew is not excluded from the community by not properly believing. He is not cut off for practices that required such discipline in the Torah (witchcraft, divination etc. which is common in Israel). However, the norms

of practice are rooted in beliefs maintained in the sub communities of the Jewish people, especially in Orthodoxy. The issue of creed was negatively defined by the Supreme Court of Israel in what we call the Beresford case when the judges held that the petitioners had no right to citizenship under the Law of Return. Why? Because the community had historically defined Jews who embraced Yeshua as Messiah and Divinity as outside of the boundaries of the Jewish community. However, the court held that their descendants were qualified for citizenship because a paragraph in the law gave citizenship not only to Jews but to their descendants. Obviously Jews who come to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah are also descendants. The court made up new law contrary to the intent of the founding fathers of Israel who defined eligibility.

In the Father Daniel Case in 1963, the court held that by becoming a Catholic, he was no longer a Jew and could not receive citizenship as a Jew under the Law of Return. One of the great ironies is that the Chief Rabbi at that time argued that the court was wrong. According to halakha, Fr. Daniel was still a Jew. No one can ever cease being a Jew who is born one. One can become apostate, and even be cast out, but one is still a Jew. So all those Messianic Jews who are told they were deceptive to claim they were Jewish have halakha on their side. According to the Rabbi, they should have been excluded from Israel as apostate Jews.

Those who assigned this topic, by their very summary of what they desired to be covered, realize that both Jewish and Christian communities have set boundaries on the basis of belief and practice. Boundary setting is necessary at least on major points of agreement so that the community does not fragment and become incoherent and ineffective in its goals. The Democratic Party has set a boundary in that no one can be

chosen for national office or the Supreme Court who does not hold to the right of a women to abortion at all stages of pregnancy. So far the Republicans have held the opposite. So inclusion and exclusion is part of the definition of clubs, political parties, religious communities and even business organizations. It is an unavoidable part of humanity and constantly produces tension between those who want the lines drawn more tightly and those who want more loosely defined boundaries.

It is true that Christianity defined inclusion by a strict confessional definitions in a way that Judaism avoided. Yet in its own way, traditional Judaism maintained a very strong community based on common practices based in some very important beliefs (the authority of the Torah and the Oral law going back to Moses).

The Messianic Jewish Community seeks to redraw the boundaries and stands against some of the ways they have been drawn by the Jewish community and the Christian community. This is a major and difficult task since both communities defined themselves against one another and sought to preclude that ground between in which Messianic Jews stand. As Messianic Jews, it is important to believe that it is ethical to seek to change boundaries through honest and direct dialogue, but not by subverting from within those communities that have drawn associational boundaries. Subverting from within takes place when people are dishonest and join communities while not agreeing with the stated standards or act in secret over a significant timeframe. Before we answer the question of who can set boundaries and when heresy, apostasy and exclusion are legitimate, we need some historical perspective.

The Torah Sets Boundaries

From the story of the Flood to the requirements of *Devarim*, the Torah asserts God's requirement that boundaries be set for those who are to be allowed in the community. In the Flood, the human race is excluded from those saved out of the Flood. The level of their sin is described with quite vivid description. In the Torah, loyalty to the One True God should be characteristic of is Israel. This is summarized in the Shema. The corollary is that that Israel is not to believe in idols or to practice the worship of idols. There are to be no other gods. Other beliefs are constantly reinforced such as the fact that the God of the ancestors delivered us from Egypt. In addition, covenant commitment is expressed in the Sabbath. Desecrating the Sabbath is a repudiation of the Covenant. The man who works picking up firewood on the Sabbath is stoned. (Nu. 15) Witchcraft and occult practice are capital crimes. There are many violations of law that require death or exclusion from the community including murder, adultery, kidnapping, homosexual practice, and more. The loss of civil control and the development of Rabbinic application loosened the application of these penalties. However, to this day, standards for exclusion are informed by the Torah in Orthodox communities. It is interesting to note that belief in Yeshua as Messiah can be a basis of exclusion in many communities but not all. Belief in Yeshua as God is a source of exclusion for most communities but we know of several exceptions. Belief in Yeshua's Divinity is considered a type of idolatry.

Standards of Exclusion in the New Covenant Scriptures

The New Covenant Scriptures already reflect the process of development with regard to inclusion and exclusion in the community. Water immersion forms the initiating point of entrance. Confessing Yeshua who died and rose again forms the basis for entrance. However, it was understood, as in Jewish proselyte immersion, as joining the community and being submitted under its government. In the beginning, submission to the authority of the apostolic band was the key to community coherence. However, as the Gospel spread and communities were formed with greater and greater geographical separation, maintaining coherence in belief and practice became crucially important and more difficult. Matthew asserted the boundary of affirming the place of the Torah in the Messianic Community, a boundary that was discarded by some. (We do distinguish Jewish and Gentile applications of the Torah). He also gave the process for judicial decisions of inclusion and exclusion (Matthew 18). John sought to see Yeshua fully honored as was his due (John 5, honoring the Son as we honor the Father) and to bring the confession of the pre-existence of the Word to prominence. In the epistles of John, there is a strong rejection of proto-Gnosticism . A clear boundary of exclusion is established with regard to any who reject that Yeshua came in the flesh. In Galatians 1 the *anathema* is pronounced against anyone who preaches a different Gospel, defined as the way of grace through faith in Galatians. However, Galatians lists the same kind of behaviors that exclude as I Cor. 5:11. These behaviors were parallel to the capital sins of the Torah. Those who practice such sins are excluded or to be avoided. The Gospel in Paul is not lawless as some have asserted. The mature statement of Paul in Romans makes it clear that faith establishes the Torah and the righteous requirement of the Torah

is fulfilled by those who walk by the Spirit (Romans 3:31: 8:4). Those who cause unnecessary strife and division, gossip and slander, are to be excluded.

Early Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

Both early Christianity and early Rabbinic Judaism in the first centuries after the fall of Jerusalem sought to unify their communities by clear standards. Lawrence Shiffman in his important book, **From Text to Tradition**, notes that this was rooted in the authority of the Rabbis whose authority was traced to Moses. In Christianity, the doctrine of apostolic tradition functioned also to define authority by duly ordained bishops. Eventually the council of bishops was understood as having authority to define practice and doctrine and to set boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. At first regional councils functioned with such authority, but eventually regional authorities came to different definitions. Eventually ecumenical councils that were more broadly representative (this is debated) set doctrine and practice for the whole Church. There were eight such councils.

Messianic Jews debate the conclusions of these councils. Do we embrace the Trinitarian doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon and the ultimate definition of the two natures of Yeshua from Chalcedon and Constantinople? Messianic Jews sometimes see these councils as splitting hairs. The Greek forms of definition and the exacting language seem foreign. Yet, Oscar Skarsaune warns us to see these councils as not repudiating the Jewish Biblical context, Rather, he sees Arianism and its unitarianism as more Greek. For him, the early councils safeguarded the biblical functional language. However,

Messianic Jews will certainly reject the council conclusions that anathematized Jewish life in Yeshua, especially and explicitly in Nicaea II in 787 C. E.

The power of the Rabbinic consensus was able to exclude Sadducean, Messianic Jewish, Essene and other Jewish streams. We have evidence of excommunications, and we do have clarity that opposing Judaisms were not allowed. There were notable excommunications recorded in the Talmud. The question of who could be in leadership was key. Judaism did not give exacting doctrinal definition near to the extent of Christianity, but reasons for exclusion seemed clear to those who made such decisions.

Exclusion was not absent in later developments in Judaism. Mutual exclusion became pronounced in the battle between the new Chasidic movement and the more traditional Misnagdim in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Such exclusions take place between Judaisms today, even to the point of physical violence.

The Church developed quite a coherent text of what one must believe and do to be accepted in the community. J. N. D. Kelly, the great historian of Christian doctrine, saw the establishment of the office of the bishop and then the councils as preventing the churches from devolving into ineffective fragmentation. Gnosticism and Arianism was defeated. Of course, the Church had come to be the State Church and its doctrinal consensus was defended by the authority of the Emperor and the power of the sword. For Eusibius, this was a happy development but for many others who looked back on the oppression of the State Church, it was a very bad turn of events.

Daniel Boyarin in a fascinating book, **Borderlines**, shows how Judaism and Christianity drew their boundaries in their separation. What a place we occupy in the

light of this! If anyone doubts that early Rabbinic Judaism set boundaries as strongly as Christianity, one should read Boyarin. Boyarin gives too much credit to the post modern analysis of the will to power of the dominant group in setting boundaries in both Christianity and Judaism and not enough credit to a genuine and sincere quest for truth. Yet, in my view, his book is brilliant. One important thesis in Boyarin is that Christianity and Judaism embraced a rigid separation on the basis of the two powers in Heaven idea. The idea of Logos or Wisdom as almost a second deity yet one with the one God was, according to Boyarin, a common and accepted part of Jewish understanding in the first century. Indeed, he argues that it may well have been the majority conception. Christianity developed by requiring all to believe in the personhood of the second power and that this logos (wisdom) became flesh in Yeshua. Judaism developed in such a way to exclude the Logos. Was it a conscious mutual development of mutual opposition? Boyarin does think this is likely, but the exact proof is difficult. At any rate, the exclusion of the Logos was only achieved by a long process and it became an excluding border. In addition, the inclusion of the Logos incarnate was as an absolute border (though its origins are clearly in the New Testament) was achieved by a long process and finalized in Nicaea I. .

Previous to Christianity, there was no such thing as religion apart from ethnicity. Separating a belief system as transcending ethnicity, a system that could include all ethnic groups was the new development of Christianity. Judaism then also defined itself as a religion which contrasted Christianity. However, this religious definition apart from ethnicity never attained the separation from ethnicity as in Christianity. After the formative period of early Rabbinic Judaism, Babylonian Talmudic Judaism embraced a

plurality of viewpoints as essential to Judaism. Yet if anyone thinks that this plurality for interpretation in debate was the elimination of borders, Boyarin's evidence shows that, though in a less overt way than Christianity, Judaism maintained its borders with great firmness. Deeds and not creeds is really a very bad misrepresentation of the reality of Rabbinic Orthodoxy.

I think Boyarin's argument is very compelling.

Evangelicals and Messianic Jews

Some years ago, three Messianic Jews, two Catholic leaders and one Episcopalian were received by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. At the time he was the head of the Catholic College of the Doctrine of the Faith. We were informed by our Catholic friends that we must not mention connection to the Free Churches (Evangelicals) because it was well known that the Cardinal did not have much regard for these churches and considered them shallow. We were to present ourselves totally in a Jewish context. We did so. At the end of the meeting, the Cardinal remarked to the Catholics in private that it was quite predictable that the Messianic Jews would arise from the free churches since they were much more flexible and open to change. He was not put off, but appointed an important Cardinal as the unofficial liaison to the Messianic Jewish Community.

In this regard it is important to understand that the boundaries set by Messianic Jewish communities generally flow out of Evangelical standards. We have to deal with whether we believe this is a positive good that informs our community, something to repudiate or something to transcend while maintaining that which is true and good. To

understand the last 35 years of Messianic Jewish boundaries, it is important to understand the development of Protestant boundaries. The most important standards that form the consensus of most conservative Protestants are standards that have been accepted by Messianic Jews. There are divisions in the Evangelical world because some have set boundaries more narrowly, and sometimes Messianic Jews are condemned by adherents of the more narrow definitions (the recent attack on some of our UMJC leaders by a more fundamentalist Christian oriented Messianic Jew in the **Messianic Times** is an example).

The Reformation required a new formulation of boundaries. The fathers of the reformation had hoped for a new unity in new formulations. It was not to be. There was unity on the Bible as an ultimate authority. The hope was that it was capable of being interpreted in such a way that there would be a consensus in doctrine and practice. However, soon enough there was a breakdown. The Lutherans found commonality in the Augsburg confession that built on the acceptance of the ancient creeds (Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed). St. Anselm's (12th century) interpretation of the atonement (substitution-satisfaction) was strongly embraced. Lutherans sought to embrace a restored historic liturgy and a strong doctrine of the real presence of Yeshua in the elements of the Eucharist. Reformed Christians also built on the creeds but embraced a symbolic efficacy view of the sacraments. A real transaction happens in participation in the symbol. Among the Reformed, church government by elders was elevated as restoring biblically required government. Zwingli came to the conclusion that the sacraments were testimony signs. He paved the way for the Baptist orientation that is so common among Evangelicals. The sacraments are not called sacraments (the physical conveying the real life of what is portrayed or within them) but ordinances. Christians

could not transfer membership between such communions, but had to be re-disciplined for the new stream. At any rate, church streams produced confessions of importance such as the Heidelberg confession among the Reformed and the Westminster Confession among Presbyterians. Also we note the 39 Articles of the Anglicans. No comparable confession existed among Jews except Maimonides' 13 articles which was never embraced as an absolutely required confession. It was written as a Jewish response to Christian confessions.

Over the centuries an Evangelical consensus formed, a larger overarching unity that can be traced to Lutheran Pietists and the Moravian quest for unity under Count Zinzendorf, whereby a broader general confession unified Evangelicals. So by the end of the 19th century there was general recognition of Protestant orthodoxy among the faithful in Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Baptist and many other communions. When the higher critical movement in biblical studies and the theory of evolution (which was pervasive well beyond the discipline of biology) threatened traditional belief, Evangelicals sought to draw together in an ecumenical confession. In 1909 a confession was adopted at a conference in Niagara, New York. It built on the creeds but simplified them. Some disparaged the efforts. Those who supported previous classical statements like the Westminster Confession saw such efforts as shallow. Yet the Niagara Statement had enormous influence. Denominations, Bible Schools and Christian Colleges embraced it. It found its way in its original form or in modified form one organization after another and its influence continues to this day, some 100 years later! A Messianic Jew might note how strong the statement is on belief and how weak on practice, the importance of cultural influence and so much more. Yet most of us have seen and have

been influenced by this statement. In addition, many Messianic Congregations in America and Israel have doctrinal statements that have been unknowingly been influenced by it. Many modified statements from the churches and organizations that have influenced them. Many who do not accept these statements would find important truths in these statements that they still would want to affirm and which would still form boundaries for inclusion and exclusion. They would see these statements as an accurate reflection of biblical teaching. Others would see these statements as too influenced by a particular perspective of 20th century Fundamentalism.

The Evangelical doctrinal consensus was of great importance, though it was an American consensus. European Evangelicals believed that such new statements were unnecessary and preferred the ancient creeds along with such statements as the Westminster Confession and the 39 Articles. Yet because of the great influence of American Evangelicals in World Missions, their consensus dominated missions around the world. This included Jewish missions, especially after World War II, since many of the European missions were decimated by the war and their Jewish constituency destroyed in the Holocaust. We should note that aside from asserting the full trustworthiness of an inerrant Bible, Baptists stated that the Bible was sufficient and no creed should be accepted. Yet Baptist teaching was in accord with the Evangelical consensus.

So what was and is this consensus? Generally most of you who are gathered will recognize it. It is that God is the eternal, personal Creator of the universe, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. It includes the doctrine of the person of Yeshua in his divinity as pre-existent to the creation, one person who is fully divine and

fully human. It includes the necessity of conversion or being born again to gain a positive post death destiny, everlasting life. This conversion is by the work of the Holy Spirit, without which people are eternally lost. It includes the doctrine of heaven and hell; the saved to everlasting bliss in heaven and the lost to everlasting conscious punishment-damnation in hell. It includes the doctrine of the personal second coming of Yeshua, the resurrection of the dead in the Messiah, and the translation of those in Messiah who are living. All of this is based on the assertion of an inerrant Bible meaning that all of its texts speak what is true when rightly interpreted according to the intent of the passage. Some explain inerrancy in a very sophisticated way and others in a more simplistic fashion as if the Bible claims to be an exacting scientific text..

I repeat; ,this formulation has been criticized by those in historic confessional churches as too brief and shallow. They want more classic definitions such as the more detailed expression of the two natures of Yeshua, or a deeper understanding of baptism and the Eucharist. The National Association of Evangelicals simplified the Evangelical Statement into a shorter version but which mostly follows the outline. It is amazingly simple.

I should note that Eastern Orthodoxy has its own consensus of boundaries rooted in a level of reverence for Patristic Fathers, which we would find strange. Yet there are parallels to the Jewish reverence for the ancient sages. No new statements are deemed necessary. Orthodoxy is amazingly clear on its boundaries. One friend, an Armenian Orthodox in Cyprus, visited the Greek Orthodox bishop and was promptly told that the Armenian Orthodox are heretics and she would have to be re-baptized. So the Armenian Orthodox are outside the boundaries of the Greek-Russian Orthodox consensus.

The Roman Catholic Church has reaffirmed the ancient creeds but now provides authoritative interpretation since Vatican II. Its new doctrinal teaching summarized in the New Catholic Catechism provides an amazing definition of boundaries. To the sadness of the Magisterium, Catholics are not as submitted to the authority at the level desired. How much the Catholic Church will enforce its stated boundaries is a live question of enormous import today.

The Consensus of the Messianic Jewish Fathers, 1970s

The Messianic Jewish Movement was birthed from Evangelicalism with a great boost from the Jesus movement. The first leaders; Manny Brotman from Moody Bible Institute, Ed Brotsky and Marty Chernoff from the Baptists, myself from the Evangelical Presbyterians and Wheaton before that, John Fischer from Philadelphia College of the Bible and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Ray Gannon from the Assembly of God, and so on. When we asserted the importance of Jewish calling and identity in Yeshua, from a Zionist Israeli orientation (Chernoff) or from a Covenant responsibility and Torah application (Juster, Fischer, Stern) we were very severely attacked. In response, we sought to defend our Orthodox Evangelical convictions, but with an addition. In this regard, we gained defenders from the Fuller School of World Missions (1976) , the National Association of Evangelicals (1975), Louis Goldberg of Moody Bible Institute, and from other important Church leaders. At that stage in development, it seemed that a modified Evangelical consensus statement, Judaized and with the addition of statements on Israel and Jewish calling was the right way to go. Besides, most of us agreed with the substance of Evangelical statements. One now sees such statements in perhaps the majority of Messianic congregations in America and according to Kai Tshur-Hanson's

book on the Israel movement; the same basic statements are found in many Israeli congregations. Accusations of heresy in Israel are usually based on violating such standards. A recent gathering in Israel was held to diffuse the attack on one leader who affirmed Jewish tradition. His views on tradition were considered beyond acceptable boundaries. However, this is not the consensus in Israel. Tradition is rejected by many, but embracing tradition is not deemed heresy. Generally, there is great liberty within the Israeli consensus. The doctrinal statement of the UMJC still reflects this late 1970s consensus.

All of this is background. Finally we move to the issues at hand. How these issues are engaged will determine the future of our movement.

Some Presuppositions-Starting Points

First, even within the limits of our defining border statements as they now exist, it is important to understand that the Messianic Jewish Movement has been seeking to redraw the borders of an acceptable standard and to gain the acceptance of Church and Jewish world to the extent that we can in our re-drawing of the borders. For the Church world, we seek to overcome years of doctrinal definition whereby Jewish life in Yeshua was defined as heretical. There is a 1900 years history of such definition and it continues in some church circles to this day. In the Jewish community, we assert that acceptance of Yeshua as the Messiah and even his divinity is not sufficient cause to exclude us from the Jewish community. Other philosophies and beliefs embraced by Jews are fully contrary to classical Jewish standards. The embrace of such does not cause such casing out. If

our redrawn borders for our own communities are accepted, than the borders drawn by the Church and the Jewish community will need adjustment.

Secondly, it is my view, as the view of those who gave this assignment I suppose, that borders have to be drawn. If they are not, we will have no coherent thrust forward as a movement, but will fractionalize into ineffectiveness. I have seen drawing borders too strictly and too broadly both lead to this ineffectiveness.

Thirdly it is important in drawing borders to reject post-modern relativism. The Messianic Jewish world has no teaching *magisterium*, we have no Rabbinic council that is likely to gain authority across the wide breadth of the movement. Therefore, our progress will be made on the basis of a deepening perception of biblical truth in dialogue with all kinds of faith communities that seek to assert their faithfulness to biblical truth. Perhaps to some, my speaking of biblical truth in a post modern age seems naive. The post modernists have put forth several emphases. First, our understanding is according to our community background. We are told that we cannot transcend this community background. In addition, theological orthodoxies are only orthodox because orthodoxy represents the winning side in a terrible battles of power assertion and domination. Witness the Trinitarian battles of the 4th century. Blood was shed in these battles. The post modernist tends to side with the losers and sees the standard accounts of history skewed in favor of those in power. History writing is itself power assertion that must be deconstructed. Freud has more influence in post modernist historiography than Augustine!

I cannot voice my disagreement too strongly. We certainly do see through the glasses handed to us in our communal upbringing. However, those glasses may not be a total distortion. The victors in theological struggle may give correct historical accounts as well. Why should our idea of bias be totally anti-establishment? However, a full postmodern relativism is the end of believing in truth. I am well aware that from an intellectual point of view, this is a harder task than was understood by our forefathers. Yet, by comparing community interpretations and by researching the context of texts, we can move toward a more adequate understanding. (Ricoeur). I have called my approach inter-subjective. The right kind of inter-subjective approach does move toward objective truth. If we do not believe this we should go on vacation and forget about arguing for the truth. Is replacement theology really false, or just contrary to our communal interpretation? Is replacement interpretation is just as valid for the communities who hold to it?. Does anyone really want to believe this? Those who assert their post modernist understanding have the burden of proof in showing how they have not abandoned any real hope for discovering truth according to any historical meaning of the word.

In this light, I believe that for Messianic Jews, our consensus and boundary setting will develop and change as we engage the biblical text with the idea that there is a real and important meaning intended by the text to which we are in submission. We will engage the text in dialogue with others who read the text with different information and from different backgrounds. We will seek information on cultural backgrounds to more accurately understand the texts of the Bible. In addition, our study of Judaism will be important in dispelling either the unthinking almost mystical adulation of everything

Jewish or the rejection of Judaism as totally false and unworthy . Instead a biblically renewed mind in Yeshua with a Spirit inspired heart will bring a consensus evaluation of Judaism that will also be part of new borders. So it is my view that there is such a thing as Biblical Theology and that we can come to consensus on what its foundational boundaries are and what it says concerning Messianic Judaism. Secondly, it is my conviction that a balanced consensus has to be attained concerning our evaluation of Judaism that will be part of our boundaries. This leads us to the specific questions to be addressed.

How Shall Bottom Line Faith Commitments Be Established in Messianic Judaism?

First, we have to realize that we are not beginning in a vacuum. We already have such bottom line faith commitments as reflected in the statements of most of our organizations and congregations. I think that the question is, do the borders need adjustment or even more wholesale revision? It is the assertion of needed adjustment or revision that has produced a good deal of shaking in our movement. I do have some advice that has implications for the other questions in this assignment. The consensus can change from two directions. First is there are those who accept the recent present borders (from the late 1970s onward) and honestly confess their agreement with the stated standards. Then there are those who cannot do so. My view is that those who cannot do so in integrity need to leave the organizations in which they hold membership or not seek membership in organizations where they do not agree with the membership standards. It is acceptable if a person basically agrees with what is affirmed as the standards of an organization, but still believes that the organization would be better defined more broadly or differently. They can argue from within. Those who truly

disagree should not subvert from within, but should argue from without and form new organizations with others with whom they have agreement. This is integrity. I do strongly believe in dialogue with those with whom we disagree. Over the long haul, those who gain the most in numerical growth will have the most effect on the consensus.

My point here is to reject subversion from within as a way of changing borders and boundaries. I have watched this process and do not see any gain from subversion. First in the historic denominations, I see no benefit that those who did not believe in the standards said they did but did not, and then worked to change them. In the Anglican Church, we are seeing the wholesale break up of this great international communion. My former denomination, the Presbyterian (I tally the total numbers before the merger of North and South) the decline has been from some 5 ½ million to some 2.5 million in 30 years. The American Episcopal Church has declined from 3 million to 1.1 million. I am greatly saddened to see this decline. I really believe that the numbers for members put forth today are an overstatement. In the same period, the Southern Baptists have added millions, as have other Evangelical streams. Why? Because a clear and definite standard that inspires others to join is a key to growth. Recently I have also observed the Conservative Jewish Movement come into great crisis. The standard of moderation between Reform and Orthodox Judaism has broken down as Conservatives have been pushed to the Reform side. At the same time, in response many have left and joined modern Orthodoxy. I simply cannot see how the demise of the Judaism of Heshel is a good thing. In these cases, the issue has been liberalizing subversion from within.

The present organizations can change standards when they become convinced, with their membership, that adjustment would be good. Those making such adjustments

will do so not because they could not embrace the old standard, but because they believe the adjusted standard is more adequate to who should be included. Broadening inclusion can happen without subversion or fragmentation. Witness the broadening of Evangelical organizations in our day, from the National Association of Evangelicals to some of the Evangelical denominations. It is not so much that their convictions changed, but they broadened their views of inclusion. This broadening has been a sixty years process. It began in the 1940s with Carl Henry's book **The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism**. It continued with Billy Graham inviting mainstream Church leaders of questionable theology to be on the platform in his New York meetings (1956). There was a gradual process of change. Today John Stott is accepted among Evangelicals despite advocating conditional immortality. Others with Open Theism positions are accepted in spite of vigorous debate. The mainstream Evangelicals have not excluded them, though most would not agree with them. Proponents of wider hope views are included in the Evangelical community. They have argued that the original Niagara Conference views were too narrow and were not the views of the early Church Fathers, John Wesley or the great Baptist Strong. New Evangelical statements have shown this broadening. However, the most foundational historic standards, in their understanding, are still upheld. It is obvious that I am already touching on the later question of ethical guidelines and on the integrity of our profession. If those with significantly different borders and standards seek to capture the heart of the movement, they should do so by producing a growing number of adherents in other organizational frameworks so they eventually gain the day or to persuade the leaders of the other organization by dialogue. They should not act in a way that would fragment the existing organizations.

What Specific Ways Should the Messianic Jewish World Deal with Those Deemed to Have Moved Outside the Camp?

I would like to ask some questions. It is difficult to stand outside the boundaries drawn by Judaism and Christianity and to assert new borders. This leads to some difficult questions. Should we be glad if someone stood outside of the present boundaries and professed Yeshua as the Messiah, but did not profess his divinity? Or if he or she embraced the Gospels, Acts, General Epistles, Hebrews and Revelation, but rejected Paul? Would we think it better that they came to such a position or better that they have never come to believe that Yeshua is the Messiah? I know of Jews, even in one case an Orthodox Rabbi, who holds to such a position.

Then again, what of that stream called the Ephraimite Movement that claims that true believers in Yeshua are really physical descendants of the lost tribes and are called to keep the whole Torah.? Or what about those in one law movements who claim that Jews and Gentiles have the same relationship to Torah, and are to apply it in the same way? I personally believe that these views are heretical and are great dangers to our movement.

In all these cases, people are outside the mainstream camp of the Messianic Jewish community. How would I treat them? Both would be invited to visit our congregation, but would not be entitled to do anything to convince ordinary members contrary to our standards. In larger **circles of leaders**, however, the former would be invited to dialogue, whereas the others are so beyond the pale of reasonable Biblical theology, that only attempts to persuade them to give up their false views would be accepted. Their views are simply and biblically incredible. However, I can readily

understand the conclusions of Jews who come to see Yeshua as Messiah and not divinity though I could not agree. **Such a person has made progress toward the truth.**

However, if one professed our standards and then gave up belief in Yeshua's divinity, there is greater danger. Both would be excluded from membership, but our approach in dialogue may be more wary in the latter case.

The Ephraimites and One law people have come to conclusions that strike at the heart of the whole meaning of our movement. They discredit the Church. If successful they would destroy the uniqueness of Jewish calling and election and would not just move boundaries for Jewish identity, but would obliterate them. Since these people are interested in gaining adherents, they would probably end up having to leave our congregations. In cases where they have come, when told they could not share their views in our midst or distribute their books, they have left! These have done enormous damage in our relations to the Church, Some churches think they are part of our movement.

We must still maintain an order where we understand who is outside the camp and who is within. Those who profess faith in Yeshua and who are in gross moral error or seek to influence others in the community to doctrinal error, after due process and if not repentant, must be removed (Matthew 18:15 ff.) Others in a positive mode of relationship can attend while in dialogue with leaders. Outside of the fellowship of the congregation, leadership gatherings can include many in dialogue who disagree. With such folks, we are called to be respectful and engage in mature dialogue with a loving and humble attitude. Membership is a key to boundaries, but is not itself sufficient.

Who Has the Right to Claim Another is a Heretic, Apostate or Sectarian?

Anyone can claim another is a heretic. “Only I am left,” cried Elijah. Bishop Lefabre claims that the post Vatican II Catholic Church has as a whole embraced serious error. What a challenge he has embraced! So any congregation, association of congregations, ministry etc. may define their standards and by their standards claim that another is an apostate. **The question is who can credibly do this?** In the history of Judaism and Christianity, such claims came from communal leaders gathered together who had a weight of authority, respect and credibility to do this. The Messianic Jewish Movement lacks such authority and every time it is attempted, those who are marked are able to find enough support so that the marking is not effective is not fully effective. In Israel there have been ad hoc attempts of leaders to assert discipline and mark those outside the boundaries. Success has been limited. There are only a few cases of some who have been marginalized because they have explicitly rejected the Deity of Yeshua.

The UMJC is the closest to having such credibility, and I know of no other organization that has this credibility. Why? Because its government represents a significant number of congregations whose leaders are delegates with authority. Secondly, only the UMJC has a significant number of biblical thinkers who are somewhat versed in Judaism. If its theological leaders come to consensus and this consensus is approved by the delegates, then there is some weight. I know other organizations may seek to so act, and if they have a significant constituency, they may do so with some limited credibility, but eventually in my view, their decisions will only have weight if their work is more widely affirmed. The standards will have to hold up in the marketplace of ideas and the debate that will follow. All organizations have to speak for

themselves, but no one yet speaks for the whole Messianic Jewish World or even a large sub section. I am one of those that hope for change in this regard. We should note that one man's orthodoxy is another's heresy or heterodoxy. However, in spite of this, every congregation and organization should set out its boundaries, its commitment to beliefs and practices as the basis for those who are to be part of the community so those who do not embrace the standards can look elsewhere. This is not necessarily a matter of discipline for sin. A more severe exclusion is required in the case those who are professing to be followers of Yeshua yet live contrary to Biblical teaching (I Cor. 5).

As Messianic Jews, we seek to redraw borders. This is a very necessary task but an undertaking with fear and trembling because doing this in the wrong way could destroy us but doing it rightly could help establish us. In so doing, we have to see where the Church was right and not only act in reaction to Christians. We could too easily then redraw boundaries in ways that depart from biblical teaching. It will take time if a new consensus is to be built. Only those who represent larger significant associations can do this with credibility, effecting the movement as a whole.

How Does an Individual or Groups locus of Primary Affiliation and Identity Inform the Issue of who is an Insider or who Remains Outside the Messianic Jewish Community?

At the present time there are three types of organizations that provide affiliation in the Messianic Jewish community, the congregation, the association of congregations (which may include ministries), and the pro-Messianic Jewish Missions organization (e.g. Chosen People). If the leaders of a congregation have strong convictions, they will form

a community where those convictions are shared. To not share in those convictions is difficult and in most cases will lead to separation, a separation that one already experiences as an outsider before there is literal physical separation. However, there are leaders who are not able to unify congregations according to their convictions and many different orientations are found in the community. Love for the leader may hold such a group together along with a less clearly defined theology. I know of two such congregations. In both cases a leadership replacement is taking place. A new leader will find it difficult to keep the congregation together because of a lack of coherent theological conviction. It is not that there are no basic convictions, but that there is more looseness on matters that most Messianic Jews would find important. Generally, the congregations allow for all kinds of persuasions as long as everyone is committed to Yeshua. I believe a Messianic Jewish congregation needs to draw more clear borders on the basics of our beliefs/commitments including the place of Torah, the irrevocable calling of the Jewish people and the distinction in the New Covenant of Jew and Gentile.

Missions organizations also produce a culture where some orientations will place one on the outside. We have recently seen a broadening of Chosen people's orientation where basic Evangelical convictions are enforced, but varieties of understanding with regard to Jewish calling, grace, charismata, law and more are accepted. So in this mission the Evangelical orientation is a limiting boundary.

In an association of congregations, and we have several, the UMJC, IAMCS, the UMJC of Russia, and Tikkun, boundaries are explicitly defined. However, the UMJC and Tikkun are the most theologically developed among all associations worldwide. Tikkun ties together those with certain charismatic and restoration convictions, but

otherwise embraces the defining boundaries of the UMJC. In this regard, a rejection of UMJC standards will lead to being outside the boundaries and will lead to being an outsider. A leader from New England who denied the Deity of Yeshua was engaged in dialogue that led to his leaving the UMJC. This is a legitimate exercise of discipline. The UMJC has brought cases of discipline in situations of infidelity, illegitimate divorce and remarriage, and in other situations of difficulty and strife. Usually such discipline was in regard to primary moral considerations, but as the first case shows, doctrinal issues are included. However, we do have tensions in the movement as to how borderlines should be drawn. A commission of the UMJC consisting of past Presidents and General or Executive Secretaries surveyed the UMJC. The conclusion was clear. The UMJC overwhelmingly affirms a conservative doctrine of the authority of Scripture and the importance of personal faith in the death and resurrection of Yeshua as important in determining one's final destiny (without precluding something of a wider hope view). More work should be done on this last issue. These tensions have been expressed by some saying that they fear that they will be on the outside. The UMJC is taking stands that were not clearly defined before. The new definition of Messianic Judaism is a case in point. However, it seems clear now that a calm and discursive approach to borders has replaced the previous shaking.

The issue of primary identity is a very interesting one from a Messianic Jewish point of view. On the one hand, it is crucial that we recognize that we are called to an identity in community with those who are passionate in their New Covenant faith in Yeshua. On the other hand, our Jewish members are part of the Jewish people. This is a non negotiable given, though this community may seek to marginalize Messianic Jews.

Sometimes in Messianic Jewish communities there is a tension with those committed to fuller involvement the larger Jewish community especially in traditional synagogue life, leading to making them outsiders from the Messianic Jewish community. There is a fear that they will be too influenced by the larger Jewish community. In the future, we will have to see a unity in our movement whereby both commitments are non-negotiable, at least among Messianic Jews. That Jewish community commitment should be a source of suspicion among some in our movement shows that we have much maturing to do. I think it is important to note that our movement is divided between those who would more primarily identify with the Church world and those who would most identify with the Jewish community. This is natural in the light of our history. However, it is important that we learn to accept one another in regard to backgrounds that influence such commitments.

What are the Key Ethical Guidelines for this Area?

Because of the age in which we live, clear boundary definitions are important for our movement. Without them, I am convinced, we will lose coherence and from that lack we will lose any potential for growth. The 20th century has proven this to the point of my having no doubt in the premise.

However, once boundaries for doctrine (belief), practice, and morals are clarified, it is crucial that all be honest. Those who do not accept the boundaries drawn by an organization need to separate from membership. Others can form organizations with different boundaries. Leaders of organizations can be in dialogue. However, honesty is a key beginning of ethical integrity. To not act with honesty and integrity on the matter of

membership standards is to be a subversive in the midst of the organization. How much destruction has been caused thereby!

The question that follows is on how we deal with people who we believe have come to a place of violating the boundaries. If they are within the organization, then direct and loving confrontation should be the norm. A person needs to have their side heard. If there is agreement that the boundaries have been violated, then the person can either come into accord with the boundaries or leave. However, some boundary violations are serious violations of moral standards themselves. For a person to profess to be a follower of Yeshua and to live in adultery, to divorce and remarry without biblical grounds, to engage in patterns of slander and more, should lead to sanctions from the disciplining organization. In addition, aside from exhorting such a person to repent, Scripture enjoins us to avoid a relationship.

I should note that it is ethical to express differences in arguments, even passionate ones, expressed in journals, magazines, forums and more. Such debates are valid ways of seeking truth. Such debates should be according to the evidence marshaled for a position, and should never call into question the motives of the person on the other side of an issue. We also have to learn the other's position well enough so that we can explain it to their satisfaction. To not treat the other with this level of respect is violate his worth as a person created in the Image of God.

Some of you know that I have written a book on this called **Due Process**. We can relate lovingly to people with all kinds of positions on all kinds of subjects as long as they are honest and do not profess something which foundationally deceitful.. This is

why the Bible requires separation from those who call themselves brothers but engage in grossly immoral behavior. However, if the profession of being a follow of Yeshua is not part of the mix, we are to engage for love's sake. The limits of such engagement are merely the leading of the Spirit and of course that the person has not come to hold to positions that are heinous and foundationally satanic (e.g. Anti-Semites).

One of the sections in this book argues against divisions over issues that are not of foundational importance. I do not mean that we should not join together with the more like-minded, but we also should reach across divides where essentials are not at stake and in dialogue even beyond this. Some have divided because others are too traditional, not traditional enough, read the Zohar, have appreciated the Toronto renewal, have not appreciated the Toronto renewal, have embraced a wider hope view, have evaluated Judaism as mostly good and true, and have rejected Judaism and mostly bad and false. Again, we have growing up to do.

Conclusions

I want to urge upon us all to consider that we are a movement whose primary boundaries in most of our organizations are based on the trustworthiness of the Bible. That trustworthiness is based in a commitment to the view that every text is teaches what is true according to its intent. For many texts that is to be understood according to the intent of the original author in the context of the original audience. Of course, some texts do not provide us with clarity in authorial intent. What the text means in the context of its age is open to many more possibilities. However, a basic commitment to a Bible that can be understood as having an objective meaning is our key in refuting errors such as

replacement theology. We really do believe that the Bible's real meaning is contrary to it. It is not just our communal power assertion to deny replacement theology. In addition, we really do believe that the Bible teaches that Jews are responsible to continued covenant commitment to live as Jews.

Having said this, I do hope that a greater respect for teaching authority in the movement will grow up in our movement, which authority will base itself on the authority of the Bible. I think subscribing to a teaching authority that is not absolute but highly respected could greatly help our movement. I spoke to this in response to Batya Wootteen's book, the first book on Ephraimite theology. I asserted that it would be a better world if fewer people thought that they were qualified to teach theology! She was a bit offended. Yet I do believe this. We have many errors in our movement. I think greater teaching authority is needed to defend the most important borders and boundaries. In addition, from the teaching authorities, we could have organizational endorsements of positions. Sometimes the Theology Committee of the UMJC has functioned in this way. There is enough education and variety of perspectives that when this committee is in unity and strongly behind a position, I think it is important.

I also believe that the day may come when a new confessional formulation will be needed. I say this some fear because the Judaized Evangelical statements with Messianic Jewish additions has served us well for almost thirty years now. Yet I think our statements could more clearly reflect a more biblical Jewish rooting in expression. For one thing, it is important in a more Jewish rooted statement that the behavioral implications of our tenets are made clear. In addition, there are key heresies to be repudiated. There is the Ephraimite movement and those who teach that Gentiles have

the same responsibility to Torah or application of Torah as Jews. I believe this latter has become one of the greatest dangers to our movement. It is a partial replacement theology. In addition, in application it is important to re-affirm our foundations in such a way that theological liberalism will not gain foothold, for every stream where this has happened has declined. Doctrinal statements from the past were often in response to heresies, views whose great dangers were perceived after their gaining a growing number of adherents.. We have a growing contingent of mature thinkers who are well educated, Spirit filled, and reflect different perspectives. It there can be unity among them to back a statement it could be a great gain. I think the UMJC definition of Messianic Judaism is a key statement that has greatly turned us in right definition. It would also be helpful to have a statement on Judaism that neither is an unthinking adulation or a negative rejectionist stand. Could a statement on Judaism be developed which would gain the adherence of the great number of Messianic Jewish leaders? I would like to see it.

In addition, I think that the wider hope issues,, especially for Jews, has produced a great deal of shaking. In my view, wider hope views are not heresy or a basis for exclusion, but are troubling when the definition is too wide. Could we come to a consensus that would unify the movement and bring greater maturity? Universalism would, in my view, be outside of acceptable boundaries. I do hope for progress in these matters.

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